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Vilsack previews Great Places

Initiative will help stimulate innovation; streamline resources

DES MOINES – Governor Tom Vilsack today provided a first look at plans for the Great Places initiative, which he announced in his Condition of the State address in and created by Executive Order 39 in January.

“I’ve spoken often about my first experiences of Iowa and the connection I felt and how I was drawn to build a life here. I know there are lots of folks – some born in Iowa, some who have moved here and some who have only visited our state – who can share similar experiences,” Vilsack said. “Great places mean different things to different people. We all know great places in Iowa. We have a responsibility to preserve them, capitalize on them, learn from them, help them become even greater. That’s what the Great Places initiative will do.”

The Great Places concept emerged through the state’s new purchasing results budget process in the area of transforming Iowa’s economy. It is designed to bring together the resources of state government to build capacity in communities, regions, neighborhoods or districts to cultivate the unique and authentic qualities that make the places special. The Great Places initiative will also bolster the state’s other successful economic tools like Vision Iowa and the Iowa Values Fund.

“I am calling for bold thought, innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship, both at the local level and across state government,” Vilsack said. “I want the state to be a true partner with the great places, stimulating ideas and planning, streamlining access to available state resources and helping leverage local and private resources and sharing technical expertise.”

Vilsack was joined at a press conference by the directors of the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, Iowa Department of Economic Development and Iowa Finance Authority, the agencies charged with implementing the initiative. Cultural Affairs Director Anita Walker described the Great Places process design, by which places will invite the state to partner with them to help identify and access resources needed to achieve their vision.

“It’s a breakthrough approach that demystifies state government,” Walker said. “Rather than building a dream piecemeal, we will provide a one-stop shop. We’ll work together to synchronize and streamline programs to fit a place’s vision, not to make the vision fit our programs. Our goal is to work in collaboration with local leaders, combine resources for high impact and deliver results.”

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Walker announced ten regional forums across the state would kick off the initiative: May 17 in Clear Lake; May 18 in Spencer; May 19 in Council Bluffs; May 23 in Dubuque; May 24 in Pella; May 25 in Cedar Falls; May 26 in Muscatine; June 1 in Cedar Rapids; June 2 in Des Moines; and June 9 in Sioux City.

The state's Great Places team – made up of representatives from 18 state agencies – will receive invitations by July 1 from places that want to pursue the initiative. Throughout July and August, Great Places “coaches” will work with the places to get their offers ready for presentation in September. By October 1, a citizen advisory council appointed by Vilsack will help select three “pilot” Great Places. Negotiation of partnership agreements with those places will take place through the fall, with final agreements by December 31, 2005.

Following is the “Great Places” Executive Order:

EXECUTIVE ORDER NUMBER THIRTY-NINE

- WHEREAS,** Iowa must transform its economy in order to be prosperous; and
- WHEREAS,** in order to transform its economy Iowa needs Great Places to live, work and raise a family; and
- WHEREAS,** Great Places retain and attract young people, educated workers, business development, entrepreneurs, families and retirees; and
- WHEREAS,** Great Places are culturally vibrant, offer diverse housing options, and capitalize on their authentic constructed and natural environment; and
- WHEREAS,** local governments, community leaders, businesses, and non-profits must be part of the effort to develop Great Places; and
- WHEREAS,** Iowa must cultivate opportunities for bold thought, innovation and entrepreneurship at the local level; and
- WHEREAS,** by focusing financial and technical resources the state can build local capacity, capitalize on the unique strengths of place, and unleash Iowa's creativity;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Thomas J. Vilsack, Governor of the State of Iowa, by the power vested in me by the Laws and the Constitution of the State of Iowa, do hereby order the creation and implementation of the IOWA GREAT PLACES.

Purpose: Iowa Great Places is designed to bring together the resources of state government to build capacity in communities, regions, neighborhoods or districts to cultivate the unique and authentic qualities that make these areas special places to live and work, and among the assets on which communities will capitalize are the arts and culture, historic fabric, built environment, natural environment, housing options, retail amenities, entrepreneurial incentives, business development, and diversity.

- I. State agencies shall participate in the Iowa Great Places, identifying ways to package together resources under their control into a competitive effort to be awarded to the
- II. most creative and innovative communities, regions, districts or neighborhoods aspiring to be Great Places.

- III. The Department of Cultural Affairs, Department of Economic Development and Iowa Finance Authority shall be responsible for the development of Iowa Great Places. Their directors, and the directors of other state agencies including but not limited to Department of Human Rights, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Transportation, and Iowa Workforce Development, offering resources to Iowa Great Places, will serve as a Council to determine awards to Great Places.
- IV. Iowa Great Places will be housed and coordinated at the Department of Cultural Affairs.
- V. A citizen advisory board of up to 12 members shall be established to advise in the design of the Iowa Great Places and assist in the selection of three pilot Great Places. The board shall include representatives from the following groups: community leaders, local government officials, cultural leaders, housing developers, business owners, and parks officials.
- VI. Design of the Great Places initiative will be completed by June 30, 2005. A report shall be issued that includes the following:
- An inventory of tools, resources, funding sources and technical assistance available
 - The completion of a kaizen of state programs to improve synchronicity, eliminate duplication, improve accessibility and increase collaboration
 - Definition of criteria for Request for Proposal
 - Definition of criteria for readiness to participate in the Great Places program
 - Strategies to prepare communities for the application process
 - Measurement tools to assess the success of the Great Places program
- VII. By June 30, 2006, three pilot Great Places shall be selected to receive a package of resources to be determined by the Great Places Council. These pilot Great Places will serve as a learning laboratory for the new program. Funding will be applied to program design, preparation of communities and investment through grants, loans, technical assistance and services to pilot Great Places.

Nothing in this Executive Order shall be construed to contravene any state or federal law.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto subscribed my name and caused the Great Seal of Iowa to be affixed. Done at Des Moines this 11th day of January, in the year of our Lord two thousand four.

THOMAS J. VILSACK
GOVERNOR

ATTEST:

CHESTER J. CULVER
SECRETARY OF STATE

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